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# **Fiscal Year 2003**

## **Food Stamp Program Participation Grants**

### **Request For Applications**

#### **Critical Dates**

**January 2, 2002**      **Request for Applications announced by FNS**

**February 27, 2003**      **Proposals are due**

**May 2003**      **Awards to be announced**

An electronic version of this Request for Applications is available at  
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## **PURPOSE**

Congress has provided the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) a unique opportunity to support efforts to bring about real, systemic, and lasting change in the ways food stamp offices attract applicants to the Food Stamp Program (FSP), process applications, and verify information. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171), often referred to as the “Farm Bill”, provides FNS with the authority to award \$5 million dollars in grants for each of the fiscal years 2003 through 2007, to State agencies, public health or educational entities, or private nonprofit entities such as community based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations. FNS will award grants primarily in the range of \$750,000 to \$1 million dollars, with a maximum possible award of \$2 million dollars. This solicitation offers funding for fiscal year 2003, subject to appropriation. Funding for fiscal years 2004 through 2007 is also subject to appropriation.

The number of individuals participating in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) fell from its all time high of 28 million in March 1994 to a low of 16.9 million in July 2000. While some of this decrease was due to Welfare Reform and the strong economy in the 1990s, we are concerned that there are barriers that prevent eligible households from applying and being certified for food stamp benefits. The number of individuals participating rose to just over 19 million by June 2002, in part due to a downturn in the economy. However, participation among those who are eligible for benefits - the ‘participation rate’ - remains low at only 59 percent. The State agencies that administer the FSP, called ‘State agencies’ throughout this Request For Applications (RFA), have made a concerted effort to reach out to eligible individuals and break down barriers to participation using such measures as: changing office hours so working households are able to apply without taking time from work; making applications available on the internet; and doing outreach to hard to reach populations such as the elderly or immigrants. Despite these efforts, applicants still experience difficulties when seeking information about the FSP, applying for FSP benefits, and providing adequate and timely verification for certification. Many potential applicants find the system so daunting that they will not even attempt to secure benefits to which they are entitled.

This grant competition is designed to support projects that develop and implement:

- Simple food stamp application and eligibility determination systems; or
- Measures to improve access to food stamp benefits by eligible applicants.

Accordingly, this RFA focuses on the human, technological, and administrative systems that State agencies use to bring applicants into the food stamp office and to determine their eligibility

and benefits. Further, it encourages patient, detailed examination of barriers to participation and thoughtful development of new or revised systems, management structures, training programs, and technological aids that are intended to have a direct, positive impact on the way food stamp offices encourage participation, take applications, record intake information, verify information provided by applicants, and determine eligibility and the amount of benefits.

## **WHO MAY APPLY**

### ***Eligible Entities***

The entities eligible to receive grants under this competition are:

- The 53 State agencies that administer the Food Stamp Program;
- State or local governments;
- Agencies providing health or welfare services;
- Public health or educational entities; and
- Private nonprofit entities such as community-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations.

### ***Letters of Commitment***

FNS recognizes that the grant proposals responding to this RFA will directly affect State agency operations. Therefore, the grant proposals must show that a State agency strongly supports or is intimately involved in the proposed project in order to be considered. Please refer to the two types of letters of commitment described below to determine which is appropriate to be submitted with the RFA.

***Statements from the State or local food stamp agency:*** If the proposal is from an agency or organization other than a State agency, it must include a statement of commitment from a State agency. If an organization is not partnering with a State agency, it must include a letter of endorsement from the State agency. If it is partnering with a State agency, the letter of commitment must describe the State agency's role in the project and the amount of time it intends to commit to the project, and an attestation that it was involved in the planning of the project, will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project and will use the results of the project to improve practice.

***Statements from the Partner Organizations:*** If the proposal is from a State agency working in partnership with other organizations, it must include a

statement of commitment from each such organization that includes a description of its role in the project, the amount of time it intends to commit to the project and an attestation that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project.

### ***Number of Applications***

As mentioned above, FNS has designed this grant competition to give State agencies control over the submission of applications involving their operations via the mechanism of “Statements of Commitment.” If State agencies decide to submit more than one application each, or to enter into more than one partnership each, FNS encourages them to make explicit in each application its relationship to any others. State agencies with more than one partner organization may want to consider submitting a single application designed to make sub-grants to the partner organizations. Proposals forwarded by any given State agency should request funding for distinct, non-overlapping activities.

### **CRITICAL DATES**

<b>January 2, 2002</b>	<b>Request for Applications announced by FNS</b>
<b>February 27, 2003</b>	<b>Proposals are due</b>
<b>May 2003</b>	<b>Awards to be announced</b>

### **FUNDING AND DURATION**

Up to \$5 million is available in FY 2003 for the Food Stamp Program Participation Grants. FNS will award the grants through a competitive process. FNS plans to announce the grant awards to the selected grantees in May 2003. Grantees will be allowed to use the grant funds for the duration of the project period. The grants will be funded for the period June 1, 2003, through May 30, 2006; however, we will entertain projects of shorter duration. We anticipate awarding grants primarily in the \$750,000 to \$1 million range, but no grant will be awarded for more than \$2 million.

FNS reminds applicants that the submission of a proposal does not guarantee funding.

Funding for approved grants will be provided through the Grant Award/Letter of Credit process, in the same manner as other funds, upon receipt of a properly executed Grant Agreement and

subject to the availability of funding. All Program Participation Grants funds must be obligated and all activities under the Grant must be completed by May 30, 2006.

## **USE OF FUNDING**

### ***Allowable Use of Funds***

Projects predicated on demonstrating the effectiveness of waiving food stamp regulations in order to conform to other programs would not be allowable; however, if during the grant period, the State agency determines it needs a waiver, it may apply for one, though there is no guarantee it would be approved.

A project may consist of, but is not limited to:

1. Establishing methods for applying for benefits and determining eligibility that use communications by telephone or electronic alternatives such as the Internet. (Developing a computerized payment accuracy program would not be allowable.)
2. Coordinating the application and eligibility determination processes, including verification practices, under the FSP with those of other Federal, State, or local assistance programs.
3. Establishing methods for applying for benefits that improve the administrative infrastructure used in processing applications and determining eligibility. For example, analysis of a State agency's existing application processing could suggest re-structuring staff assignments, changing the sequence of items in the application interview, or automating parts of the verification process.
4. Developing procedures, training materials, and other resources aimed at reducing barriers for nonparticipating individuals and at reaching eligible households in one or more States.
5. Improving methods for enrolling eligible households.
6. Identifying, measuring or analyzing barriers to participation, provided that the efforts are linked to a process for improving FSP access. (Research on barriers to participation with no implementation strategy would not be allowable.)
7. Performing management analyses that examine ongoing practices in FSP offices from such perspectives as communication patterns, human relations, efficiency, supervisory structures, organizational culture, and the like, provided that the analyses are linked to processes or systems for improving service delivery and customer satisfaction.

(Analytical studies not linked to the improvement of FSP administration in specific sites or States would not be allowable.)

8. Training food stamp personnel to use systems, techniques, or skills involved in their grant-funded project. (Training that aims to improve general casework or technological skills not linked to the program improvement strategies of a funded project would not be allowable.)
9. Re-designing application forms or other printed media used in the outreach, application, or certification processes of one or more State agencies to make them user-friendlier. (Development of such materials is allowable only if it is linked to actual food stamp operations in one or more specific State agencies.)
10. Performing observational or ethnographic studies designed to identify communication and human relations issues that need to be addressed through training or changes in administrative procedures. (Such a study not linked to program improvement would not be allowable.)

## **APPLICATION REVIEW AND GRANT AWARD PROCESS**

### ***Screening and Review Process***

FNS will screen all applications that meet the published deadline for submission to ensure their completeness and conformity to the requirements of this announcement. Applications that meet the screening requirements will be reviewed competitively and scored against the criteria listed on pages 7-9. A panel composed of USDA staff, other federal agency staff, and other individuals committed to furthering the goals of the FSP will convene to review and determine the technical merit of each grant application and provide a numerical score using the evaluation criteria and weights specified below.

### ***Technical Evaluation Criteria and Weights***

#### **1. Soundness or Merit of Project Design (35points)**

***Problem analysis:*** The proposal clearly delineates the problem to be solved, and provides evidence that it is worth solving.

***Impact:*** The proposal spells out a clear progression from idea to practice in a State agency. Impact can be described in terms of the percentage of a State agency's caseload that is expected to benefit, the size of positive impact on a specific population such as elderly applicants, or the degree of improvement applicants/participants are expected to experience. The proposal shows that the project or program improvements can endure beyond the grant period.

***Quality:*** The proposal shows that the project is innovative and has the potential to be transferred successfully to other State agencies. The proposal shows that the project has the potential to be sustained after the grant period ends. The proposal shows thought, analysis, clarity, and the use of relevant facts and knowledge. The proposal shows evidence of cooperative planning among partners, cooperative implementation of the project, and clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the partners.

***Feasibility:*** The project can be implemented within the rubric of FSP law, policy, and practice.

## **2. Budget Appropriateness and Economic Efficiency (20 points)**

***Budget:*** The proposal includes a line item budget that demonstrates how funds will be spent, by whom and for what purpose. It also contains a budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies costs.

***Efficiency:*** The anticipated results are commensurate with the cost of the project

## **3. Organizational Experience and Management /Staff Capability (25 points)**

***Credibility:*** The proposal establishes the applying organization's credibility and capabilities.

***Time period:*** The proposal allows sufficient time for proposed tasks, as represented in a project timeline.

***Communication:*** The proposal clearly demonstrates that effective communication will exist among staff and or partnering organizations.

***Staff:*** The proposal identifies the director and other key staff. The proposal includes resumes that demonstrate that the proposed staff has the appropriate technical and experiential backgrounds for their proposed roles.



***Letters of Commitment:*** The proposal includes letters of commitment from the project director, key staff, and, if applicable, partnering organizations if any delineating duties and amount of effort that will be contributed to the project.

**4. Project Oversight and Evaluation (15 points)**

***Oversight:*** The proposal demonstrates effective and consistent oversight by qualified project managers.

***Evaluation:*** The proposal describes a well thought out, organized review and evaluation process. Evaluation should focus on measuring the magnitude of the improvements the project seeks to make.

**5. Presentation (5 points)**

***Quality:*** The application is well presented, well organized, well written, and complete.

***Format:*** The application is single-sided, on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper. Type size is at least 12 point and margins are at least one inch.

***Selection of Grant Applications***

After the panel evaluates and scores the grant applications, it will rank them by score, starting with the highest score. In general, the grants will be awarded in rank order until the total available funds are committed. The panel will then provide recommendations for funding to the selection official based on this method of selection. The selection official will consider panel recommendations; however, he or she may also consider other factors, such as past performance on FNS grants, geographic, demographic, or socioeconomic diversity, agency priorities, etc., in addition to the scores assigned by the technical review panel. If the panel review indicates that FNS has received few or no technically acceptable proposals, the selection official may determine that FNS will make no awards, or commit less than the \$5 million set aside for this purpose. In addition, FNS reserves the option to select one or more lower rated applications in order to achieve a diversity of focus area topics and regional presentation.

***Determination of Award Amounts***

If an application has been selected and approved for funding and the budget submission is realistic and well supported, the application will be funded at the level requested. However, FNS reserves the right to fund applications out of ranked order, at a lesser amount if it judges that the application can be implemented with less, or if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards, or not to fund an application based on the merit of the application.

***Award Notification and Issuance of Funds***

FNS will notify selected State agencies or organizations in writing by May 2003. We will issue funds prior to the end of September 2003.

***Terms and Conditions***

For each project selected for funding, the applicant must sign a grant agreement, which will contain the terms and conditions of the grant. Uniform administrative requirements for grants appear at 7 CFR 3015. Administrative requirements for grants to State and local governments appear at 7 CFR 3016. Subparts A-E “Government-wide Debarment and suspension (Non-procurement)” appear at 7 CFR 3017. Subparts F “Government-wide Requirements for Drug-free Workplace (Grants)” appear at 7 CFR 3017. Administrative requirements for grants to non-profit corporations and institutions of higher education appear at 7 CFR 3019. Cost principles for for-profit organizations appear at 41 CFR 1-15.2. Audits of state, local governments and non-profit organizations appear at OMB Circular A-133. Grantees are subject to the requirements of the applicable cost principles, which appear in the regulations cited above.

**RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Grantees selected in connection with this solicitation will be required to submit quarterly Financial Status Reports (SF-269A), quarterly progress reports, and final reports. Grantees will be required to submit an original and two copies of each report. FNS will provide a reporting schedule and the address to which grantees may send reports at the time of award.

The selected agencies or organizations must operate a financial management system that provides accurate, current and complete disclosure of the financial status of the project. The progress reports must provide a brief description of the project activities conducted during the reporting period, major accomplishments with completion dates and budget deviations from the proposed plan, difficulties encountered and solutions developed, and major planned activities for the next quarter. The final progress report should be a project summary that includes lessons learned, future implications within the State, and transferability to other States.

Materials developed with funding from this grant must be submitted in MS Word format and a hard copy must also be submitted at the end of the grant period. FNS reserves a royalty-free copyright of any materials developed with this grant funding. This does not necessarily imply any endorsement or approval of the material contents.

**APPLICATION PROCEDURES*****Due Date for Letter of Intent***

The applicant should complete and submit the Intent to Submit an Application Form (see attached example) by **January 24, 2003**.

***Due Date for the Application Package***

- The completed application package must **be received** by FNS at the following address on or before **February 27, 2003 at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time**.
- You must meet this deadline by delivering the application or by mailing it sufficiently in advance of the deadline to ensure its timely receipt. Late applications will not be considered in this competition. We will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received.

***Mailing Address and Contact Information***

- Application packages must be sent to Lynn Rodgers, Grants Management Officer USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Grants Management Division, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 738, Alexandria, VA 22302.
- Applicants may contact Lynn Rodgers to ask any questions about the grant application and questions seeking clarification of technical or procedural aspects of the grant competition via phone at (703) 305-2760, or via e-mail at [Lynn.Rodgers@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Lynn.Rodgers@fns.usda.gov).

***Checklist for the Application Package***

**1) The application package must include:**

**\_\_\_\_\_ The Application for Federal Assistance**

- Cover Letter – A cover letter should be the first page of the grant application
- Grant proposal that responds to the criteria and includes all of the proposal components discussed herein;
- Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance;
- Standard Form 424(A), Budget Summary;
- Standard Form 424(B), Assurances;
- Assurances/Additional certifications as included in the attachments to this solicitation document. The regulations governing the attached certifications (i.e., Drug –Free Workplace, Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension, and Anti-Lobbying Restrictions) require that a grantee submit the required certification with each new submission of a grant at the time of application.

**\_\_\_\_\_ The Correct Number of Copies**

- An original bearing the original signature of the authorized representative.
- Two copies of the original application.

### **\_\_\_\_\_ The Correct Format**

- The original must be ready for copying, i.e., single-sided, unstapled, unbound, and on 8 ½ by 11 white paper;
- Type size must be at least 12 point;
- Margins must be at least one inch;
- Original and copies must be on white paper;
- The application may be no more than thirty pages long, including attachments such as letter of commitment and resumes. The Federal application form and certifications and assurances do not count toward the thirty-page limit. The application and attachments cannot include videotapes, brochures, binders, folders, or sleeves.